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# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**THE U.S. AND MEXICO: TRADING PARTNERS,  
RELUCTANT MILITARY ALLIES**

by

Rafael H. Garza, Jr.

March 2010

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Arturo C. Sotomayor Velazquez  
Harold A. Trinkunas

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**THE U.S. AND MEXICO: TRADING PARTNERS,  
RELUCTANT MILITARY ALLIES**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(WESTERN HEMISPHERE)**

from the

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## **ABSTRACT**

The United States (U.S.) and Mexico are more than neighbors sharing a common border. Since 1994, their economies have become more interdependent than ever by the entry into force of the North Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which made Mexico the United States' third-largest trading partner. In spite of growing economic and social interdependence, the reality is that bilateral military cooperation remains limited, with the armed forces of both countries rarely interacting with each other. Why are the U.S. and Mexican militaries so distant? Why is Mexico a U.S. economic partner, but not a military ally? This study analyzes U.S.-Mexico relations from an historical perspective and assesses how bilateral military cooperation has evolved since World War II. It finds that common threats and growing economic interdependence cannot account for the absence of military-to-military cooperation. Instead, different military mission sets, divergent orientations and the absence of civilian control in Mexico imposes significant obstacles to improving military relations with the United States.



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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

AOR	Area of Responsibility
D.E.A.	Drug Enforcement Agency
DTOs	Drug Trafficking Organizations
EZLN	Zapatista National Liberation Army's
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
IMET	International Military Education and Training
JMUSDC	Joint Mexican-U.S. Defense Commission
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NORAD	North American Aerospace Defense Command
NORTHCOM	United States Northern Command
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
O.A.S.	Organization of American States
PEMEX	Petroleos Mexicanos
PRI	Revolutionary Institutional Party
U.S.	United States

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

Since the 1990s, a quantitative and qualitative shift has occurred in economic relations between Canada, Mexico and the United States (U.S.) through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). NAFTA has led to a much deeper level of economic and social integration between neighbors, especially in terms of U.S.-Mexico relations. Nevertheless, in spite of this economic partnership, Mexico and the United States are far from being military allies. Since NAFTA was signed in 1994, the United States and Mexico have rarely developed institutional links in the military domain, with few bilateral military agreements and no formal alliances between these two neighbors. Why have these two countries been so distant in their military relations, while being so close in economic and social terms? Why have these two economic partners been unable to become military allies? Why is military cooperation with Mexico so difficult to achieve?

## **B. IMPORTANCE**

The puzzle described above can be justified in empirical and theoretical grounds. Empirically speaking, the United States and Mexico share the “world’s longest continuous international divide between a super power and a developing nation.”<sup>1</sup> According to the International Boundary and Water Commission, the border between the United States and Mexico is 1,954 miles long,<sup>2</sup> and it shares 50 existing border crossings.<sup>3</sup> Border crossings by personal vehicles, pedestrians, trucks, and trains totaled

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<sup>1</sup> Fernando Romero, *Hyper-Border, The Contemporary, U.S.-Mexico Border and Its Future* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 42.

<sup>2</sup> International Boundary and Water Commission, <http://www.ibwc.state.gov/> (accessed September 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Romero, *Hyper-Border, The Contemporary, U.S.-Mexico Border and Its Future*, 51.



approximately 138.6 million in 2008.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, strong social and economic bonds exist between these two countries, since Mexico is the United States' second most important export partner (13.3% of all U.S. exports go to Mexico, second only to Canada with 23%).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the largest Mexican Diaspora lives in the United States, which only increases the ties between both countries. Almost 13% (12.5%) of the U.S. population is Hispanic, of which approximately 9% is Mexican-American, making this the largest minority group in America.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, Mexico is strategic to U.S. interests, not only because of its economic importance, but also since both nations are socially integrated.

More intriguing, the levels of bilateral cooperation in issues other than military affairs have increased substantially since the entry into force of NAFTA. Interestingly enough, trade relations between the two countries have been formalized in an international agreement and the two countries have a number of bilateral institutions to mediate when a conflict arises. Nevertheless, such levels of institutionalization are not evident in the military domain. This is a rather puzzling fact, especially when comparing U.S.-Mexico relations with, for instance, U.S.-Canada or U.S.-U.K. relations, where concomitant levels of cooperation exist both in the military and economic domains, through institutions, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). This, in turn, raises the question of why Mexico and the United States seem unwilling to cooperate in the military domain, while they remain as strong economic partners. Empirically speaking, this is puzzling since no other major U.S. economic partner is as distant in military terms as Mexico is today.

Theoretically speaking, the U.S.-Mexico case appears puzzling also. For years, both liberals and realists have explained international institutions and cooperation among

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<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Border Crossing Data, <http://www.TranStats.bts.gov/BorderCrossing.aspx> (accessed September 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Romero, *Hyper-Border, The Contemporary, U.S.-Mexico Border and Its Future*, 55.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=01000US&-ds\\_name=ACS\\_2006\\_EST\\_G00\\_&-redoLog=false&-mt\\_name=ACS\\_2006\\_EST\\_G2000\\_B03001](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-ds_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_&-redoLog=false&-mt_name=ACS_2006_EST_G2000_B03001) (accessed September 2009).

states through various mechanisms. From a neo-liberal perspective, formal cooperation arises when countries can identify the benefits of cooperation; in other words, when they can overcome collective action and relative gain problems.<sup>7</sup> In many ways, Mexico and the United States would actually benefit from such mechanisms by signing agreements and establishing a formal institution in the military domain. For instance, cooperating with the NORAD might help both countries overcome their mutual suspicions, while dealing with common security challenges, especially on the southern border. Yet, despite the many incentives for cooperation, Mexico and the United States have rarely shared common military institutions. In fact, the last time the two countries signed a military agreement was during World War II, when the Mexican government authorized U.S. bomber planes to land at Mexican airports on the way to Panama. At that time, radar systems were established on Mexican territory, and most importantly, a limited number of U.S. military personnel—in most cases without uniforms—were allowed to enter the country.<sup>8</sup>

Likewise, realism argues that alliances are formed when countries face common threats—the larger the threat, the more likely that they can balance against a common enemy. While this provides for a strong explanation of the 1941 and 1945 levels of military cooperation, it is still necessary to explain why both countries did not cooperate militarily in the aftermath of WW II and in the post-Cold War era. Clearly, both countries faced common threats emanating from the Soviet Union, guerrilla movements, drug trafficking and now terrorism. Yet, the levels of military cooperation between both countries have been insignificant at best.

Consequently, U.S.-Mexico military relations pose a number of theoretical questions as to what enables neighboring states to cooperate in the military domain. Neither neoliberalism, focused on mutual gains, nor neorealism, focused on mutual threats, seem to explain why Mexico and the United States have rarely cooperated with

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<sup>7</sup> “Six Decades of Multilateral Trade: What We Have Learnt? The Economics and Political Economy of International Trade Cooperation,” *World Trade Report 2007* (December 2007): 93.

<sup>8</sup> Maria Emilia Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies, Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II* (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 6.

each other in military terms. In other words, why have Mexico and the United States shown relatively low levels of cooperation, in spite of the incentives to work together and in the face of common threats?

### C. LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the literature examined for this study confirms military cooperation with Mexico is almost non-existent, aside from a small number of military sales and joint training programs.<sup>9</sup> Mexico's resistance to cooperate with the United States can be attributed to several factors. Indeed, the existing literature covers multiple approaches and offers diverse, if not incompatible, diagnoses of the bilateral relationship. From an historical perspective, most studies available on U.S.-Mexico security relations have focused on the role of nationalism and ideology in determining both cooperation and conflict. For instance, it is often argued that Mexico's resistance to cooperate with the United States is rooted in its recent history of interventions and dual conflict. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mexico lost more than half of its territory during the Mexican-American War of 1846–48. "The U.S. territories of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, California, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming were all once part of Mexico."<sup>10</sup> The early 20<sup>th</sup> century did not modify the status of the relationship; characterized by mutual resentment, since then President Woodrow Wilson authorized a military intervention in the port of Veracruz in 1914.<sup>11</sup> From this perspective, the legacies of past wars exercise an influence on today's bilateral relations, as evidenced in Mexico's nationalistic rhetoric and in its excessive defense of non-intervention.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> J. Burkett, "Opening the Mexican Door: Continental Defense Cooperation" (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2005), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen I. Schwab, "The Role of the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force in World War II: Late, Limited, but Symbolically Significant," *The Journal of Military History* 66, no. 4 (October 2002): 1115–1140, <http://www.jstore.org/stable/3093266> (accessed February 12, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

A second approach available in the literature stresses cultural perception and misperception as a driving force behind conflict cooperation among states. For instance, Mark Heredia argues that United States Northern Command (NORTHCOM) staff members have unproven ideas as to the secrecy that surrounds the Mexican Army. During one of Heredia's interviews, a NORTHCOM civilian described the relationship as a:

. . . cultural thing . . . the U.S. perception of a lack of cooperation because of the historical legacy going back to 1848 . . . a pervasive theory. The U.S. thinks that the Mexicans hold a grudge. What about the Mexicans? Thinking as a Mexican—don't trust the U.S. because the U.S. always acts in its own self-interests. Why should I [Mexican] help the U.S.? What's in it for me? The U.S. regards Mexico as a third-world country and a banana republic. The U.S. attitude is that Mexico needs help. The Mexican's see themselves as independent, but they see the U.S. attitude as an impediment.<sup>13</sup>

Another NORTHCOM civilian speaks of the Mexican nationalist legacy and then links this to attitudes towards military cooperation:

Mexican society and military cultural issues are the big obstacle. Mexico is trapped in its burden of history . . . eleven invasions . . . there is a slide showing Mexico under NORTHCOM's area of responsibility in the command briefing that we do not show to the Mexicans.<sup>14</sup>

As John A. Cope argues:

Deep Mexican aversion to outside scrutiny and the absence of transparency in their domestic policy making make Mexicans' views on improving military-to-military relations difficult to determine. In addition, a cultural veil of secrecy traditionally conceals the thinking of both the Mexican armed forces and Foreign Ministry on issues related to national security.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mark L. Heredia, "North America Security Cooperation: Prospects for Growth" (PhD diss., University of Denver, 2006), 72–73.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> John A. Cope, "In Search of Convergence: U.S.-Mexican Military Relations into the Twenty-first Century," in *Strategy and Security in U.S.-Mexican Relations beyond the Cold War*, ed. John Bailey and Sergio Aguayo Quezada (San Diego: University of California-San Diego, 1996), 180.

While these two approaches provide insights about Mexico's skepticism towards the United States, they are insufficient to explain the lack of military cooperation among both neighbors. Mexico's strong nationalist feelings and historical legacies did not prevent Mexican authorities from signing a NAFTA in 1994. If anything, the increasing levels of cooperation witnessed in other policy domains indicates that nationalism is not an obstacle to bilateral cooperation. Thus, why is cooperation more likely in the economic realm than in the military domain? Nationalism and historical legacies should affect both policy realms, as social and historical trends equally influence them.

A third factor available the literature on U.S.-Mexico relations focuses on military structures, particularly the U.S. defense organization, which is structurally different from Mexico's. For instance, Mexico's Secretary of Defense has been traditionally a four-star general, which is in contrast to the U.S. structure, where a civilian leads defense policy. This has important consequences on the way both authorities interact. Since the placement of Canada and Mexico within NORTHCOM's Area of Responsibility (AOR), Mexico's Secretary of Defense is expected to work in tandem with NORTHCOM command, as opposed to dealing directly with his counterpart, the Secretary of Defense. This unorthodox structure promotes asymmetric relations among authorities and is the source of resentment within Mexico military institutions. As Mark Heredia argues, "this makes the Mexican Army General feel somewhat subordinated,"<sup>16</sup> if not isolated, from the decision-making process in Washington.

This insight explains the tactical problems that U.S.-Mexico military relations face on a day-to-day basis, but it is insufficient to explain the overall absence of military cooperation. If structure and organization were the main obstacles to military agreements and military-to-military cooperation, then both countries could have resolved this issue with relative ease by mutually adjusting their command structure. After all, both countries have adjusted their security organizations in the past; most recently, in the aftermath of 9/11 and the end of the Cold War. Clearly, a structural and perhaps more systemic impediment to military cooperation in U.S.-Mexico relations exist.

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<sup>16</sup> Heredia, "North America Security Cooperation: Prospects for Growth," 99.

International relations perspectives provide a fourth factor to explain cooperation and conflict in U.S.-Mexico relations. For instance, from a realist perspective, power asymmetry shapes cooperation among states. The United States is big and powerful enough to act unilaterally without consulting its minor partner. On the other hand, Mexico is significantly smaller and afraid of bandwagoning with the United States for fear of appearing as too dependent on the north. Hence, both countries have few incentives to cooperate and prefer not to constrain themselves by binding each other through institutions of cooperation.

Furthermore, relative gains considerations also shape the nature of cooperation. As David Baldwin argues:

When faced with the possibility of cooperating for mutual gains, states that feel insecure must ask how the gain will be divided. They are compelled to ask not “Will both of us gain?” but “Who will gain more?” If an expected gain is to be divided, say, in the ratio of two to one, one state may use its disproportionate gain to implement a policy intended to damage or destroy the other. Even the prospect of large absolute gains for both parties does not elicit their cooperation so long as each fears how the other will use its increased capabilities.<sup>17</sup>

Robert Jervis reinforces this idea by arguing that cooperation in the security realm is harder than economic cooperation since “many of the policies designed to increase a state’s security automatically and inadvertently decrease the security of others.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, security regimes, such as military alliances, are very difficult to achieve...“because the fear that the other is violating, or will violate, the common understanding is a potent incentive for each state to strike out on its own even if it would prefer the regime to prosper.”<sup>19</sup> Keeping military cooperation informal and without any institutional linkages thus serves U.S. and Mexico interests, allowing the former to act unilaterally if needed, while preserving the image of the latter as an independent and

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<sup>17</sup> David A. Baldwin, *Neoliberalism, Neorealism, and World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 5–6.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

autonomous state.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, from a realist perspective, Mexico and the United States are hesitant to cooperate on military issues due to a set of perverse incentives, including hegemony and the unequal distribution of gains emanating from formal cooperation.

Realist insights can account for why countries are unable to cooperate, but they do not seem to explain why certain countries are better able to cooperate in some domains and in certain times. As mentioned above, the United States and Mexico cooperate in trade and financial issues, and they even cooperated in the military domain during World War II; yet, cooperation has not been constant or maintained over time. In other words, the patterns of cooperation between the two North American nations have varied throughout time, suggesting that relative gains and asymmetry are insufficient as a form of explanation, since they have been a constant in the bilateral relationship.

#### **D. HYPOTHESES**

This studies assesses three different sets of hypotheses regarding U.S.-Mexico relations. The first two set of hypotheses are drawn from international relations perspectives and provide systemic arguments to explain why countries are unable to cooperate. Systemic realism, or neo-realism, argues that the extent to which two states cooperate on military issues and form alliances is determined by their mutual level of threat. As Stephen Walt argues in his classic book, *The Origins of Alliances*, “states ally to balance against threats rather than against power alone.”<sup>21</sup> The author, therefore, assesses the extent to which existing mutual threats affect U.S.-Mexico relations. If this hypothesis is correct, then military-to-military cooperation should be evident during times when both countries have faced common threats. Addressing this question raises the opposite; cooperation is inexistent when both countries have faced dissimilar security threats.

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<sup>20</sup> Mario Ojeda, *Alcances y límites de la política exterior de México* (México: El Colégio de México, 1984), 93.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 5.

The second hypothesis this thesis analyzes is drawn from economic and liberal international relations theories in the form of inter-dependence. Reciprocal effects among countries or among actors in different countries can characterize inter-dependence. From this perspective, inter-dependent links induce large mutual costs and increase vulnerability among states involved in interaction; hence, inter-dependence implicitly provides strong incentives for cooperation among states in an attempt to reduce those mutual costs. According to Robert O. Keohane and Joseph Nye, when inter-dependence prevails, then states are less likely to use military force to solve their mutual problems.<sup>22</sup> If this hypothesis is correct, then U.S.-Mexico military-to-military cooperation should take place when economic inter-dependence has been high between both neighbors, while military conflict should prevail when both states have been relatively independent.

Finally, a third form of explanation drawn from domestic politics and the literature on civil-military relations is assessed. It argues that Mexico and the United States have followed different civil-military relations patterns, which impede policy convergence on defense matters. Military policy is firmly based on civilian supremacy in the United States, while the Mexican armed forces exercise autonomy vis-à-vis their civilian counterparts. Hence, institutional autonomy allows the military to shape and define the country's defense policy, independent from other actors, including economic and social.<sup>23</sup> This provides the armed forces with sufficient leeway and bargaining power in deciding the scope and domain of military cooperation with its northern neighbor. This is exacerbated by the fact that the Mexican military is historically predisposed against the United States, with whom it actually fought a war in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; thus, making military cooperation extremely difficult.

## **E. METHODS AND SOURCES**

To assess the above hypotheses, a number of primary and secondary sources are researched. The assessment also relies upon the scholarship that U.S.-Mexico specialists

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<sup>22</sup> Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman, 1980), 8.

<sup>23</sup> Roderic Ai Camp, *Mexico's Military on the Democratic Stage* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2005), 39–41.



have provided over the past years. Since conducting field research in Mexico was not possible, official documents, declarations, and most widely accepted historical accounts are traced. Additional sources used throughout this study include academic journals and newspapers.

By focusing on different historical landmark events (such as World War II, the Cold War and NAFTA), it is possible to gauge variation in outcomes with multiple observations over time, as well as to determine which of the three hypotheses best describes and explains the identified puzzle.

## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW**

This thesis is divided in three sections. Chapter II, which follows this introduction, provides a brief historical review of U.S.-Mexico relations by focusing on four distinct periods of cooperation; namely World War II, the Cold War era, NAFTA, and post-9/11. This chapter also analyzes how different international relations theories do or do not explain U.S.-Mexico military cooperation. Military-to-military cooperation means service-to-service interaction, professional contact through military institutions, joint military exercises, regular and systematic ministerial meetings, disaster response, technological cooperation, peacekeeping, joint equipment purchases, military assistance, information sharing, invitation and attendance to military events, visits by chiefs of staff, attaché exchanges, and common membership to international security institutions. Chapter III assesses how dynamics in civil-military relations have shaped and affected U.S.-Mexico military cooperation efforts. Finally, the thesis concludes with a discussion of how military cooperation can shed light on the current policy debate regarding the Merida Initiative and the increasing levels of violence along the U.S.-Mexico border.

## **II. U.S. AND MEXICO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

This chapter assesses U.S.-Mexico relations from an historical perspective by focusing on four critical junctures; namely, World War II, the Cold War era, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and 9/11. It also argues that military-to-military cooperation between the United States and Mexico has varied throughout time, reaching its historical peak during World War II and then substantially decreasing in the aftermath of 1945. The evidence presented in this chapter also raises questions about mainstream international relations theories. As shown below, with the exception of World War II, military-to-military cooperation has not been associated with increasing levels of threats. Likewise, increased economic interdependence in the post-Cold War era has not led to higher levels of military cooperation either. In sum, balance of threats, as developed by neo-realism, and interdependence, as developed by liberals, are insufficient to explain the historical trajectory of bilateral military cooperation in U.S.-Mexico relations. This chapter is divided into four sections, one for each historical juncture.

### **A. WORLD WAR II: MEXICO, A RELUCTANT ALLY**

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mexico lost more than half of its territory through the Mexican-American War of 1846–48. “The U.S. territories of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, California, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming were all once part of Mexico.”<sup>24</sup> The early 20<sup>th</sup> century did not modify the status of their relationship; characterized by mutual resentment, since then President Woodrow Wilson authorized a military intervention in the port of Veracruz in 1914.<sup>25</sup> The legacies of past wars exercise an influence in today’s bilateral relations, as evidenced in Mexico’s nationalistic rhetoric and in its excessive defense of non-intervention.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Schwab, “The Role of the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force in World War II: Late, Limited, but Symbolically Significant,” 1115–1140.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

In the 1930s, the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico was threatened by land and labor struggles that dominated the Mexican setting. President Cardenas' economic and social reforms put foreign investors on the defensive after the 1936 Expropriation Law that provided the legal framework for the seizure of property. The take over of the railways in 1937 and the expropriation of the oil industry in 1938 provided the basis for increased friction between both countries.<sup>27</sup> By then, the United States had abandoned the principle "that the person and property of a U.S. citizen were a part of the general domain of the nation, even when abroad," and had committed to the Good Neighbor Policy. The timing of these changes in the policy with Mexico, as well as in the United States, was crucial, for without it, relations between the two would have deteriorated even more.<sup>28</sup>

However, by the 1940s, international events, that is, systemic events, proved crucial in improving bilateral relations. After the German invasion of Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938, the United States feared an escalation of the conflict and began to shape its hemispheric defense strategy, working out its differences with Mexico. During this time, the U.S. and British companies affected by Cardenas' oil expropriation declared an embargo against Mexico. This, in turn, led Mexico to initiate barter deals with Germany and Italy—and later Japan. Hence, the United States feared an alliance between Mexico and the Axis countries. Germany's interest in Mexico had been evident in World War I, and U.S. intelligence sources revealed that German spy rings were in operation in Mexico. These, coupled with Mexico's sales of strategic materials to Japan, concerned the United States. However, the United States considered that an aggressive measure against Mexico would have been counterproductive; thus, preferring a tolerant attitude toward President Cardenas.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Schwab, "The Role of the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force in World War II: Late, Limited, but Symbolically Significant," 1115–1140.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies, Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II*, 4.

External threats forced the United States to cooperate with Mexico, but domestic issues became the driving factor for Mexican cooperation with its northern neighbor. The presidential succession of 1940 worried President Cardenas, since the country was still institutionally fragile as it was recovering from decades of revolutionary turmoil. Cardenas chose a moderate candidate as his successor, Manuel Avila Camacho, but there was growing support for the opposition presidential candidate, Juan Andreu Almazan,<sup>30</sup> who supported the idea of allowing foreign oil companies to return to the country, which was greatly appealing to U.S. oil companies. President Cardenas feared the United States would support Almazan, and ultimately, reached Washington in attempt to win the support of President Roosevelt. The U.S. administration, in turn, was willing to support Cardenas provided Mexico was committed to the U.S. strategy of hemispheric defense.<sup>31</sup> Hence, bilateral cooperation emerged in the midst of selfish interests, in which the U.S. prioritized its strategic concerns, while Mexico focused on its domestic stability. In this sense, realist explanations about military alliances make sense; both countries became allies in the face of common threats, selfish interests, and strategic bargaining.

After the Mexican presidential election in 1940, the United States was quick to sit at the table and discuss the nature of the bilateral agenda. Amongst the issues discussed were a trade agreement, a railroad dispute, the division of water in the Colorado River, and economic aid to Mexico for several government agencies.<sup>32</sup> Interest in cooperation on the part of the United States was such that Vice President Henry A. Wallace attended Avila Camacho's presidential inauguration. Upon his return, he reported that "...for the first time since 1910 the U.S. had a good opportunity to clean up sources of misunderstanding and irritation."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Monica Rankin, "Mexico: Industrialization through Unity," in *Latin America during World War II*, ed. Thomas M. Leonard and John F. Bratzel (Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 20.

<sup>31</sup> Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies, Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Although Mexico was quick to support hemispheric defense, “it soon became evident that Mexico’s cooperation on military issues would be contingent on compromises in other fields, particularly the solution of the oil question.” Mexican officials “wanted clear indication that the U.S. was willing to make concessions.”<sup>34</sup> Eventually, the military issues were formally disassociated from those claims. However, the resolution of the expropriated oil companies’ properties was delayed. Thus, Mexico also delayed any defense cooperation with the United States. Mexico remained noncommittal towards military cooperation until the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.<sup>35</sup>

The peak of the military alliance between Mexico and the United States occurred between 1941 and 1945. Specifically, Mexico entered the war by joining the Allies in 1941, considered bandwagoning<sup>36</sup> with the United States, after the Mexican tanker *Potrero del Llano* was hit by a German U-boat, marking a critical juncture that led to increasing levels of military-to-military cooperation between the United States and Mexico.<sup>37</sup> During this time, Mexico—for the first time—made several military concessions to the United States. For instance, overflying agreements were reached and U.S. aircraft were allowed to land at Mexican airfields on their way to Panama. Several radar systems were also established on Mexican territory. Perhaps the most important concession by the Mexican government was to allow a limited number of U.S. military personnel on Mexican soil (in most cases, U.S. military personnel had to wear civilian attire). Despite these concessions, Mexico rejected the establishment of U.S. military bases on its territory and the possibility of a joint military command because these implied the deployment of U.S. troops to Mexico and the possible subordination of the Mexican Army to a U.S. officer.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies, Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Bandwagon means states will ally with the most threatening power or with the country that aggregates the most capabilities, as developed by Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, 32.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Likewise, on May 9, 1944, President Avila Camacho announced that a unit of the Mexican air force would be sent overseas to fly in the Pacific theatre, attacking Japanese forces in the Philippines. As Robert L. Scheina argues, the Mexican entry into World War II was “most timely, coming in the bleak summer of 1942 when U-boats ravaged the North Atlantic and the Japanese were capturing one colony after another.”<sup>39</sup>

Bandwagoning was not only about supporting the United States, since Mexico also gained some substantial benefits from such strategy. Mexico was able to modernize its forces and weaponry, new training methods were introduced, and one air squadron was allowed to participate in the war of the Pacific. Although the United States was the dominant partner in the bilateral relationship, Mexico was able to take advantage of the fears and needs of his powerful neighbor. “For the first time, Mexico enjoyed a certain level of leverage over the U.S.”<sup>40</sup> This proves that even small and less powerful states can gain from bandwagoning even in the face of power asymmetry and hegemony.

Similarly, Mexico’s experience in World War II allowed its armed forces to professionalize and transit from the old “Revolutionary army” to the new professional army. The new army was eager to acquire modern weapons, training, and equipment, and was “less hesitant to negotiate with the U.S., while the old army was more interested in preserving their personal power base.”<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, Lazaro Cardenas and Avila Camacho were cautious politicians, since they were careful not to grant too much power to their generals when dealing with U.S.-Mexico defense matters. For instance, “the Mexican members of the Mexico-U.S. Defense Commission were never given autonomy in the negotiations with their U.S. counterparts.”<sup>42</sup> This policy was purposely instrumented to prevent the military from becoming too powerful in Mexico.

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<sup>39</sup> Robert L. Scheina, *Latin America’s Wars: The Age of the Professional Soldier, 1900–2001, Volume II* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s Inc., 2003), 171.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>41</sup> Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies, Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

World War II facilitated military and even economic cooperation. In the economic domain, cooperation was enhanced by signing several key arrangements to lower trade barriers and open markets.<sup>43</sup> Several other arrangements facilitated U.S. loans to Mexico to develop communications.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, over 300,000 Mexicans moved to the U.S. under the Bracero Agreements to meet the work demands that war had created. These agreements were in effect from 1942 through 1964 when the agreement concluded. By the end of this period, “4.5 million Mexicans had entered the U.S. under the auspices of the Bracero Agreements.”<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, a period of cooperation began with the development of a common threat—the Axis of Powers of Italy, Germany and Japan. On the verge of World War II, the United States shifted foreign policy from the Monroe Doctrine towards a broader concept of hemispheric defense. This new policy was developed with the intention of promoting military cooperation between the nations of the Western Hemisphere to drive back the external invasion.<sup>46</sup> For the first time in their troubled history, Mexico becomes a U.S. ally on June 2, 1942 after declaring war on the Axis countries. This marks the highest period of military-to-military cooperation between the two countries. It is also the period that is best explained by realist theories, in the sense that cooperation emerged amidst increased external threats.

## **B. U.S.-MEXICO RELATIONS DURING THE COLD WAR ERA**

With the onset of the Cold War, the commitment to hemispheric defense deluded. At the same time, the Monroe Doctrine resurfaced along the same lines it was originally conceived. “Reaffirming the unilateral principle of the Monroe Doctrine—rejecting the need for cooperative defense arrangements with the Latin American countries—the U.S. strategic thinking may be said to have come full circle.”<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, nuclear weapons

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<sup>43</sup> Jorge I. Dominguez and Rafael Fernandez de Castro, *The U.S. and Mexico, Between Partnership and Conflict*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2009), 13.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Dominguez and Fernandez de Castro, *The U.S. and Mexico, Between Partnership and Conflict*, 13.

<sup>46</sup> Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies, Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 232.

changed the terms of strategic thinking since traditional armies no longer played the same deterrent role. Hence, the threat in Latin America became more ideological than military. A need to counterbalance Communism existed; and thus, political and economic tools were used to deter the Soviet menace in Latin America.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time, during the Cold War, Mexico turned towards a more autocratic economy and had a limited engagement with the U.S. economy. Without being openly confrontational with the United States, Mexico collaborated very little with its northern neighbor. “Unlike other Latin American countries, during the Cold War, Mexico did not construct a panoply of military relations with the U.S. armed forces.”<sup>49</sup> Support for U.S. military policies in Western Hemisphere multilateral institutions was absent from the 1950s through the 1980s. In addition, Mexico did not build any institutions for military cooperation with the United States to combat guerrillas, crime or Communist threats and rejected bilateral assistance from the United States under the Alliance for Progress.<sup>50</sup> This, in turn, questions realist assumptions about alliance formation, since Mexico and the United States had common external threats, but they did not develop a strategic alliance to deal with those issues.

According to Jorge I. Dominguez and Rafael Fernandez de Castro, the U.S.-Mexico relationship took a different style from the second half of the 1940s through the late 1980s. This new approach had two salient characteristics: bargaining and negligence. On the one hand, there was bilateral bargaining (rather than sheer U.S. imposition or Mexican defiance), and on the other hand, “each of the two governments, deliberately or inadvertently, invested little effort in improving the quality of bilateral relations or deepening the opportunities for institutionalized collaboration.”<sup>51</sup> Security expert David Mares summarizes U.S.-Mexico relations during the Cold War as follows:

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<sup>48</sup> Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies, Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II*, 233.

<sup>49</sup> Dominguez and Fernandez de Castro, *The U.S. and Mexico, Between Partnership and Conflict*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 10.



While Mexico's grand strategy has focused on its northern neighbor, the United States has only sporadically viewed Mexico as relevant to its grand strategy. During the early 1970s, first the drug trade and then political instability in Mexico stirred minor U.S. interest in rethinking the relationship with Mexico. That interest increased during the late 1970s, as Mexico's oil and gas industries boomed, international energy markets tightened, and the Central American foreign policies of the two countries increasingly diverged. Whether in energy markets or in Central America, however, Mexico remained a relatively minor irritant to a U.S. government more concerned about challenges from the oil producers' cartel (of which Mexico was not a member), the Soviet Union, Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and the U.S. Congress.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, during the Cold War, Mexico and the United States developed a tacit understanding whereby as long as Mexico refrained from supporting the Soviet Union, or adapting its Communist practices in its political system, the United States refrained from directly intervening in Mexican affairs. According to Mario Ojeda, this understanding developed into a tacit rule: "The U.S. recognizes and accepts Mexico's need to dissent from U.S. policy in everything that is fundamental for Mexico, even if it is important but not fundamental for the U.S. In exchange, Mexico cooperates in everything is fundamental or merely important for the United State, though not for Mexico."<sup>53</sup>

This tacit bilateral understanding did bring some benefits, even in the absence of formal cooperation. For instance, the United States was confident that its northern and southern borders were stable, and thus, was able to turn its attention to the Cold War struggle in Europe and Asia. Likewise, Mexico benefited from the non-interventionist policy of the United States. Indeed, instead of simply respecting Mexico's sovereignty, the United States almost completely ignored it.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, negligence prevailed in U.S. policy towards Mexico.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> David R. Mares, "Strategic Interests in the U.S.-Mexican Relationship," in *Strategy and Security in U.S.-Mexican Relations beyond the Cold War*, ed. John Bailey and Sergio Aguayo Quezada (San Diego: University of California, 1996), 22.

<sup>53</sup> Mario Ojeda, *Alcances y límites de la política exterior de México* (México: El Colégio de México, 1976), 93.

<sup>54</sup> Dominguez and Fernandez de Castro, *The U.S. and Mexico, Between Partnership and Conflict*, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

The one exception to this rule occurred in 1962, during the Cuban Missile crisis, when Mexico unconditionally supported the U.S. bilaterally and even multilaterally at the Organization of American States (O.A.S.). At that time, Mexico supported a U.S. sponsored resolution at the O.A.S. calling for individual and collective measures, including the use of force, to achieve the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba.<sup>56</sup> However, Mexico was the only Latin American country that did not break diplomatic relations with the Caribbean island.

One of the most controversial issues in U.S.-Mexican relations during the Cold War era was Mexico's refusal to join the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The United States was the driving force behind trade liberalization in the Western Hemisphere and the strongest supporter of GATT. Mexico, on the other hand, had developed a highly protectionist trade regime and did not join GATT until 1986. During this period, Mexico developed an inward oriented industrial development strategy and opted for an import substitution industrialization model based primarily on barriers against imports. This economic strategy enabled Mexico to manage its international trade to a certain degree. As a result, Mexico avoided becoming dependent on the United States.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, it appears the bilateral relationship was fine as long as both countries were prosperous; however, conflict did emerge among both states. For instance, the 1970s and 1980s were marked by constant diplomatic tensions amidst various economic crises in both the United States and Mexico.<sup>58</sup> For decades, Mexico emphasized the disadvantages of having a superpower as a neighbor, while failing to recognize the potential advantages of capitalizing from the largest market in the world. The death of Drug Enforcement

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<sup>56</sup> Monica Serrano, *Common Security in Latin America: The 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco* (London: University of London, 1992), 20.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

Agency (D.E.A.) agent Enrique Camarena added tension to the relationship in 1984. U.S. officials blamed the Mexican government for the Camarena incident, increasing Washington's concern about Mexico's ability to cope with narcotics.<sup>59</sup>

What is particularly interesting in this case, however, is the fact that both neighbors rejected a strategic alliance in the military domain. Quite evidently, the United States and Mexico had common military threats; however, they chose different if not diverse paths in dealing with those security concerns. For instance, because of the Cuban missile crisis, Mexico bitterly discovered that it too was a direct target of Soviet deterrence. Soviet strategists were determined to block all economic and raw material assistance to the United States in case of a nuclear war, thus, Mexican border cities and major urban metropolis (including Mexico City) were specifically targeted.<sup>60</sup> From a realist perspective, Mexico should have either developed its very own nuclear capability to deter a Soviet attack or negotiated a set of nuclear guarantees from its powerful military neighbor. In fact, Canada had followed this path through the nuclear umbrella offered by the United States via NATO. Mexico took neither of these two steps, which contradicts realist insights.<sup>61</sup>

In summary, Mexico was not a U.S. military ally for most practical purposes. As stated above, Mexico cooperated little with the United States in military terms. Although the Joint Mexican-U.S. Defense Commission (JMUSSC) created during World War II remained in existence until the early 1990s, its last combined defense plan was issued in 1955.<sup>62</sup> Mexico did not sign the Defense Assistance Treaty of 1951, and, along with Cuba, it did not have a Military Advisory and Assistance Group. Mexico preferred to purchase its own military equipment and weapons rather than to receive military assistance directly from the United States. Heedful of how the United States used military

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<sup>59</sup> Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies, Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II*, 12.

<sup>60</sup> Nadal Egea and Jorge Alejandro, "Trayectorias de misiles balísticos internacionales: implicaciones para los vecinos de las superpotencias," *Foro Internacional* 30, no. 1 (July–September 1989): 93–114.

<sup>61</sup> See Arturo Sotomayor, "Nuclear Logics in Latin America: Going Beyond the Usual Suspects," presented at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, New Orleans, February 15–20, 2010.

<sup>62</sup> Dominguez and Fernandez de Castro, *The U.S. and Mexico, Between Partnership and Conflict*, 39.

assistance in other Latin American countries, Mexico tried to decrease U.S. influence by relying on a multitude of domestic weapons and equipment suppliers. “It pursued an overt and deliberate effort to build nationalist armed forces free from foreign influences.”<sup>63</sup> For instance, even though Mexico received International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds from the United States, less than a 1,000 Mexican soldiers benefitted from such grants and exchange programs between 1950 and 1980. Again, this raises questions about why states cooperate concerning military affairs, even as they face common threats. The evidence coming from U.S.-Mexico relations suggests that domestic politics may explain the lack of interest in cooperation.

### **C. U.S.-MEXICO RELATIONS IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA: NAFTA AND BEYOND**

#### **1. Interdependence and Economic Cooperation**

The 1994 NAFTA enabled Mexico and the United States to bridge the historical gap in their bilateral relationship. In fact, NAFTA negotiations resulted in an increased period of economic cooperation between Canada, the United States and Mexico. Most importantly, it changed mutual perceptions from geopolitics to an economic partnership. NAFTA also helped to institutionalize trade, environmental and labor affairs; thus, providing a tool for resolving divergent bilateral differences. Additionally, it facilitated integration not just at the federal level, but also at the state and local levels.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, such unprecedented levels of bilateral cooperation were not seen in the military realm, where the bilateral relationship was limited to equipment purchases and military training triggered by the Zapatista National Liberation Army’s (EZLN) insurgency, in the Mexican state of Chiapas in 1994. In other words, the period of higher economic interdependence did not prompt higher levels of military cooperation, which, in turn, raises questions about interdependent theories, as developed by Joseph Nye and Robert O. Keohane.

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<sup>63</sup> Dominguez and Fernandez de Castro, *The U.S. and Mexico, Between Partnership and Conflict*, 40.

<sup>64</sup> Tomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 5th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2001), 251–258.

NAFTA was negotiated when the Mexican economy engaged in trade liberalization, after the 1980s debt crisis. Indeed, Mexico embarked on a bilateral trade strategy with the United States because it wanted to maintain U.S. markets open to Mexican exports. This process began by slowly adhering to the international trade regime created by GATT. Overall, Mexico and the United States signed six bilateral trade agreements between 1985 and 1989. Finally, after 40 years of GATT, Mexico joined the regime in 1986, making an important shift in its economic policy. This was an important move on Mexico's strategy because it signaled a commitment towards more economic liberalization.<sup>65</sup>

NAFTA negotiations began in 1991, at the request of Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Negotiations lasted for almost three years and almost collapsed when President Bill Clinton took power in 1992, since he was a traditional supporter of labor unions that vehemently opposed the agreement. Finally, NAFTA entered into force on January 1, 1994.<sup>66</sup> The accord's aim was to create a partnership between Canada, Mexico and the United States. This agreement formed one of the largest trading blocks in the world. It promoted the free flow of goods and got rid of tariffs, duties, and trade barriers over a period of 15 years between trading partners. Additionally, it gave duty-free status to almost 65% of all U.S.-made goods. Tariffs on all vehicles within NAFTA were phased out over 10 years with the introduction of rules of origins, which stipulated that vehicles must have at least 62.5% of its contents produced locally within the NAFTA countries to qualify for tariff reductions.<sup>67</sup>

The NAFTA accord opened the door for U.S. investment in Mexico in a variety of ways. For instance, under the treaty, U.S. banks could establish bank branches in Mexico and U.S. citizens could invest in Mexico's insurance industry and banks. Although, foreign ownership of oil fields was prohibited, U.S. firms could compete for contracts with Petroleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) and operate like any other Mexican company. A

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<sup>65</sup> Dominguez and Fernandez de Castro, *The U.S. and Mexico, Between Partnership and Conflict*, 65.

<sup>66</sup> North American Free Trade Agreement, [naftanow.org](http://www.naftanow.org), [http://www.naftanow.org/about/default\\_en.asp](http://www.naftanow.org/about/default_en.asp) (accessed February 26, 2010).

<sup>67</sup> Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 251–258.

very small written provision was made concerning the movement of selected professionals and executives, but the matter of large-scale migration of labor was omitted.<sup>68</sup>

Two important ideas can be stated about NAFTA and its impact on U.S.-Mexico relations. First, as Guy Poitras argues, NAFTA “symbolizes the regionalization that had already taken place in North America.”<sup>69</sup> Indeed, Mexico finally admitted that its social and economic indicators were directly linked to those in the United States. Immigration and economic liberalization had made Mexico closer to its northern neighbor, and thus, forced integration with the United States. By signing NAFTA, “Mexican leaders decided to recognize the realities of the market and to institutionalize an economic partnership with the U.S., departing from the nation’s historical tendency to maintain its distance.”<sup>70</sup>

NAFTA also reflects convergence over economic policy, and especially, over U.S. approaches to trade, investment and other issues. In many ways, it also recognizes that the economic model that best serves the interests of all countries is that of the United States. It thus increases economic interdependence and creates economic bonds difficult to untangle. As stated before, Mexico was looking to attract investment to simulate employment, and thus, reduce social tension. Indeed, NAFTA provided Carlos Salinas with the opportunity to institutionalize its economic reforms through an international treaty, and in this way, protect them from the historical unpredictability of presidential successions. NAFTA also linked Mexico with two advanced industrial democracies of the first world, allowing Mexican diplomacy to increase its leverage in relation to other Latin American countries; therefore, serving as a “bridge” between the developing world and the developed world.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 251–258.

<sup>69</sup> Guy Poitras, *Inventing North America: Canada, Mexico, and the United States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 99.

<sup>70</sup> Guadalupe Gonzalez, “Foreign Policy Strategies in a Globalized World: The Case of Mexico,” in *Latin America in the New International System*, ed. Joseph S. Tulchin and Ralph H. Espach (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 163.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 257–258.

Hence, the NAFTA negotiations alone represented an extraordinary period of cooperation for these three North American nations. After NAFTA was implemented, Mexico replaced Japan as the second largest U.S. trading partner.<sup>72</sup> It also provided a set of rules and procedures to address common problems and find common solutions to avoid conflict. Following neo-liberal insights and liberal accounts, the treaty increased information flow and technical capacities to improve bilateral policy decision-making. Likewise, institutionalization allowed Mexico to discuss sensitive bilateral issues, such as migration and drug trafficking, by separating these contentious issues from trade and finances.<sup>73</sup> Interdependence increased cooperation and “improved coordination between trade officials on both sides of the border; it also increased the burden on those officials who must deal with intensified trade and economic transactions at the border itself.”<sup>74</sup>

## **2. Interdependence and Security Without Much Military Cooperation**

Despite increased levels of economic interdependence and cooperation, Mexico and the United States resisted calls for closer military cooperation. In fact, high-level official security consultation improved in the area of public and border security, but military-to-military cooperation was limited to equipment purchases and military training, especially for anti-narcotic and anti-insurgency campaigns.<sup>75</sup>

The United States, with the implementation of Operation Intercept in 1969, coerced Mexico into the drug war. This operation virtually closed the border for 20 days and caused great economic damages to Mexico, which forced the government to capitulate to Washington’s pressures. This led to the joint Operation Condor of the 1970s

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<sup>72</sup> Gonzalez, “Foreign Policy Strategies in a Globalized World: The Case of Mexico,” in *Latin America in the New International System*, 163.

<sup>73</sup> Dominguez and Fernandez de Castro, *The U.S. and Mexico, Between Partnership and Conflict*, 74.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> In 1994, the Zapatista National Liberation Army’s (EZLN) began an insurgent movement in the Mexican state of Chiapas.

that attempted to eradicate marijuana and poppy fields. Ultimately, this policy triggered the cartelization of drug trafficking and worsened the bilateral relationship by the mid 1980s.<sup>76</sup>

It was during this time that Mexico began to accept unprecedented quantities of helicopters, specialized aircraft, spare parts, pilot training and other forms of technical assistance. It also sought to formalize the presence of U.S. law enforcement agents that for decades, with or without notification, had gathered intelligence in Mexico. In 1983, under pressure from the United States, Mexico increased its military participation in the war against drug trafficking.<sup>77</sup> This, however, does not translate into military-to-military cooperation, but is the result of unilateral action on behalf of U.S. states to tackle what is essentially a public security challenge, in the form of drug-trafficking. In other words, this is not consistent with the definition of military-to-military cooperation defined in the introduction, which includes mutual measures, such as service-to-service interaction, professional contact through military institutions, joint exercises, and regular ministerial meetings, among others.

In 1985, U.S. pressures against Mexico increased because of the Enrique Camarena incident, the D.E.A. agent murdered on Mexican soil while performing his anti-narcotic duties. Many U.S. officials accused the Mexican government—focus was placed on the police—for being directly involved in Camarena’s murder. Hence, the U.S. launched Operation Intercept II, which virtually closed down the southern border for eight days, forcing Mexico to accept unilateral incursions by U.S. security forces.

In 1986, the United States increased its intelligence operations in Mexico and began using more sophisticated military equipment. This led to the capture of two Mexican citizens accused of complicity in the Camarena affair; but such a move occurred on Mexican soil, without the consent or authorization of Mexico’s government. Eventually, this unilateral action alarmed and outraged Mexican authorities since U.S.

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<sup>76</sup> Dominguez and Fernandez de Castro, *The U.S. and Mexico, Between Partnership and Conflict*, 42.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



policy appeared to be “based on the willful disregard of the sovereignty of other states.”<sup>78</sup> Alarmed by U.S. unilateral actions, Mexico formulated new policies designed to counter its two security threats: drug trafficking and American unilateralism. In 1988, President de la Madrid declared drug trafficking a security threat to national security and staged a permanent campaign against it. Additionally, Mexico proposed a set of new agreements with the United States to facilitate extradition, such as the 1994 U.S.-Mexican Extradition Treaty.<sup>79</sup>

Another issue that increased U.S. concerns about Mexico’s security was the Zapatista insurgent movement in Chiapas in 1994. The Mexican government launched an offensive against the Zapatista guerrillas who had quickly seized seven towns. The fight ended with a cease-fire agreement on January 12.<sup>80</sup> During this time, the army and police were heavily criticized as they faced allegations of human right abuses during their operations.<sup>81</sup> In response to the Zapatista insurgency, Mexico increased its defense budget significantly; while it developed a closer security relationship with the United States. Mexico increased its defense procurement, maintenance, operations and construction.<sup>82</sup>

In 1995, Defense Secretary William Perry visited Mexico to discuss a wide array of bilateral security issues and to foster cooperation in the war against drug trafficking. This was the first time that a U.S. defense secretary officially visited Mexico.<sup>83</sup> Virtually no operational military-to-military cooperation had existed prior to this visit. These interactions set the stage for increased U.S. military training of Mexican officials and for

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<sup>78</sup> Dominguez and Fernandez de Castro, *The U.S. and Mexico, Between Partnership and Conflict*, 42–43.

<sup>79</sup> For a brief summary of U.S.-Mexico relations in anti-narcotic campaigns. See Laurie Freeman and Jorge Luis Sierra, “The Militarization Trap,” in *Drugs and Democracy in Latin America: The Impact of U.S. Policy*, ed. Coletta A. Youngers and Eileen Rosin (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 263–302.

<sup>80</sup> Alan McPherson, *Intimate Ties, Bitter Struggles. The U.S. and Latin America since 1945* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2006), 114.

<sup>81</sup> Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 254–256.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> In New Generation of U.S.-Mexico Cooperation and Trust, prepared remarks by Secretary of Defense William J. Perry, The Mexican Ministry of Defense, Mexico City, Monday, October 23, 1995, <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1011> (accessed February 27, 2010).

the transfer of military equipment to assist Mexico in the fight against drug trafficking.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, cooperation was limited to drug trafficking, and, as John A. Cope argues, a distant, circumscribed and limited military relationship still existed between the armed forces of the United States and Mexico.<sup>85</sup>

During the 1990s, Mexico ordered 263 Belgian and 28 U.S. armored personnel carriers, four UH-60 helicopters, and accepted a donation of 73 UH-1H helicopters. The irony of it all is that in 1998, a year after the purchases, the Mexican National Defense Ministry grounded the U.S. donated helicopters and returned them to Washington arguing that repair options were too costly. In fact, the helicopters were over 30-years old.<sup>86</sup> Likewise, IMET increased from half-million in 1995 to \$9 million in 1998. The number of Mexican officers instructed in U.S. military schools reached an unprecedented total of 757 officers. The same year, the U.S. government provided about \$35 million in military assistance to Mexico. “The U.S. justified this increased budget as part of the counter-narcotics effort; Mexico understood it, of course, as assistance to its national security.”<sup>87</sup>

Consequently, during this period, military-to-military cooperation increased, but it was mostly restrained to drug trafficking, with few institutional linkages similar to those developed in the economic realm, with NAFTA. In fact, the interaction between U.S. and Mexican defense authorities occurred during private meetings and through informal mechanisms, encompassing exclusively the respective armies’ chiefs and port calls by U.S. Navy ships to Mexican ports. Institutionalization of military relations remained weak at best, non-existent at worst. In sum, even as the economies of both countries increased their interaction and became heavily interdependent, military-to-military cooperation was limited. Furthermore, relations between the armed forces of the United

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<sup>84</sup> Dominguez and Fernandez de Castro, *The U.S. and Mexico, Between Partnership and Conflict*, 44.

<sup>85</sup> Cope, “In Search of Convergence: U.S.-Mexican Military Relations into the Twentieth Century,” in *Strategy and Security in U.S.-Mexican Relations Beyond the Cold War*, 179.

<sup>86</sup> Dominguez and Fernandez de Castro, *The U.S. and Mexico, Between Partnership and Conflict*, 47–49.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

States and Mexico were distant, even as both countries faced the growing common threat of organized crime. Hence, liberal and realist accounts fail to account for the lack of substantial military cooperation in U.S.-Mexico relations.

#### **D. U.S.-MEXICO RELATIONS POST SEPTEMBER 11, 2001**

On September 11, 2001, the United States was the target of terrorist attacks. Two hijacked aircraft crashed into the World Trade Center Towers in New York and one in the Pentagon in Washington. Another hijacked aircraft went down over the fields in Pennsylvania. Altogether, 3,000 people were killed.<sup>88</sup> This terrible incident changed international relations and modified U.S.-Mexico relations. From that moment on, national security became the U.S. number one priority, displacing other items in the bilateral agenda.<sup>89</sup> In response to the attacks, the United States waged a “war on terror” and refocused its international priorities to tackle international terrorism. As a side effect of the U.S. counter-terrorism strategy, Washington began to pay more attention to the security of its borders. Ironically, the war on terror increased Mexico’s strategic importance. Although, Mexico discreetly aligned its policies to cater to U.S. security priorities, many moments of public friction existed in the bilateral relationship because security priorities had taken attention away from economic and social issues, which were deemed as highly important to Mexico.<sup>90</sup>

Immediately after the attacks, the Mexican government privately supported the United States. For example, condolences were sent from President Fox’s office via fax, and two days later, he called President Bush to express his support. On the other hand, public reaction of the Mexican government was confusing. Mexico’s Foreign Affairs Secretary, Jorge Castañeda, expressed full support during a press address to the U.S. media. Yet, this action was heavily criticized by Mexico’s public opinion. Thus, in a later

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<sup>88</sup> Rodolfo Vidal, “Crónica de los hechos y patriotismo: El contenido de las revistas estadounidenses sobre los atentados del 11 de septiembre,” <http://www.ehu.es/zer/zer12/vidal12.htm> (accessed February 2010).

<sup>89</sup> Rafael Velazquez Flores, “El 11 de septiembre y la relación México Estados Unidos: hacia la securitización de la agenda?” *Revista Enfoques* VI, no. 8 (Primer Semestre 2008): 67–68.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

address to the media, Castañeda made somewhat contradictory statements, saying that the United States did not need and did not asked for Mexico's military help.<sup>91</sup> Finally, on September 18, Mexico released a public statement condemning the terrorist attacks and reiterating Mexico's support to the U.S. government and its people. Additionally, in very broad terms, Mexico expressed its position to cooperate in the international community—but not specifically with the United States—to prevent and eradicate terrorism. A few days later, President Fox expressed his support to the United States without committing Mexico's military arguing that the country did not have an army ready to fight externally. Weeks later, he visited Washington, D.C. where he reaffirmed Mexico's commitment to the war on terror.<sup>92</sup>

Overall, cooperation was private and very informal. Days after the attacks, Mexico assisted the United States with the review of travel itineraries of possible terrorists and suspicious financial transactions. Furthermore, on the eve of the U.S. war in Iraq, in 2003, the Mexican government deployed 10,000 troops to its southern and northern borders to protect the area against possible terrorists infiltration onto U.S. soil.<sup>93</sup>

In March 2003, the United States went to war in Iraq without an authorization from the United Nations' Security Council. This event triggered a serious crisis in U.S.-Mexico relations and military-to-military cooperation deteriorated. Key military allies, including the United Kingdom, Spain, and Japan, supported the U.S. war effort; however, Mexico refused to go along. In fact, Mexico was one of the 15 members of the U.N. Security Council at the time, but the country remained adamantly opposed to the war in Iraq. As Monica Serrano and Paul Kenny argue, “when deputies from President Fox's PAN (Party of National Action) referred to a “despot”, they meant George W. Bush; when a leading opposition deputy talked of ‘war, horror, death, genocide and holocaust,’ he was referring not to Saddam's Iraq but to policies that should not be supported by

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<sup>91</sup> Flores, “El 11 de septiembre y la relación México Estados Unidos: hacia la securitización de la agenda?” 69.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

Mexico.”<sup>94</sup> Hence, “Mexico balanced against the decision to go to war in Iraq and would in the years following remain strongly opposed to U.S. Iraq war policy.”<sup>95</sup> In response, President Bush both threatened Mexico with discipline and increased pressure on Mexico.

According to Jorge Dominguez y Rafael Fernandez, three factors contributed to the Fox administration’s reactionary attitude towards U.S. security policies. One was that Fox believed that the war in Iraq was a “war of choice.” Second, Fox believed no persuasive evidence existed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. Third, Fox believe that “the U.S. did not really have much carrot, and no stick at all”<sup>96</sup> because he was sure the United States would not back out of NAFTA, nor would it pull DEA support from Mexico. Additionally, Mexico had paid back all its loans to the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. Treasury. In other words, the Fox administration thought Mexico did not depend on U.S. assistance and that the United States could do little to punish Mexico. Unfortunately, for Mexico, Fox underestimated the cost to U.S.-Mexico relations.

Ultimately, the Bush administration dropped its pressures, but the damaged had been done and mutual trust between Fox and Bush did not return naturally. Mexico and the United States remained as distant military allies, cooperating exclusively on issues regarding drug trafficking and violence in borders. However, the U.S. response to the attacks of September 11 impacted Mexico’s counter-narcotics efforts. Initially, the United States had to divert assets assigned to counter-narcotics operations. It pulled three-quarters of the U.S. Coast Guard assets from the Pacific and the Gulf of Mexico, and assigned them to other missions. The Mexican Navy was left on its own to accomplish

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<sup>94</sup> Monica Serrano and Paul Kenny, “Iraq and World Order: A Latin American Perspective,” in *The Iraq Crisis and World Order: Structural, Institutional and Normative Challenges*, ed. Ramesh Thakur and Wahenguru Pal Sangh Sidhu (New York: United Nations University Press, 2006), 307.

<sup>95</sup> Dominguez and Fernandez de Castro, *The U.S. and Mexico, Between Partnership and Conflict*, 161.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

missions without the U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. intelligence. In a similar way, 60 FBI agents were pulled from the Mexican border to other missions. To complicate things, cops corrupted by the cartels betrayed the Mexican government.<sup>97</sup>

On a positive note, two political accomplishments would ease tension in the bilateral relationship. In 2002, President Bush signed the Foreign Relations Authorization Act. This suspended the U.S. drug certification and sanctions procedures that had soured U.S.-Mexico relations in the past. For its part, Mexico created a new National Security Council and its own National Security Law in 2004. These actions provide Mexico with the means to organize anti-crime efforts and gather intelligence.<sup>98</sup>

Still, by 2005 and 2006, border violence escalated, particularly on the Mexican side. President Felipe Calderon launched a major campaign against drug trafficking and other violent organizations. To accomplish this, he deployed 27,000 troops within 11 Mexican states, which in turn, assumed law enforcement functions by effectively replacing local, but unreliable, police forces. Within a month in the presidency, 284 federal police and agents were dismissed along with thousands of Mexican officials on the grounds of drug traffic-related corruption.<sup>99</sup>

In the face of increased violence, the U.S. government responded to Mexico's efforts eagerly. Cooperation with the Mexican Navy increased and "U.S. agencies trained thousands of Mexican law enforcement agents in 2007."<sup>100</sup> Yet, cooperation remained limited to security and anti-narcotics. In 2007, President Calderon and President Bush met in Merida and their administrations crafted *Plan Merida*. Mexico's proposal called

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<sup>97</sup> Dominguez and Fernandez de Castro, *The U.S. and Mexico, Between Partnership and Conflict*, 164.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> United States Government Accountability Office, Testimony before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives, Drug Control U.S. Assistance Has Helped Mexican Counternarcotics Efforts, but the Flow of Illicit Drugs into the United States Remains High, 2007, 17, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08215t.pdf> (accessed February, 2010).

for increased U.S. military training and exchange of intelligence. However, Mexico also insisted that no U.S. troops would enter Mexican territory, nor would U.S. civilian agents participate in operations inside the country.<sup>101</sup>

Plan Merida had a multilayered approach to assist Mexico and Central American countries in their combat strategies against drug. Plan Merida itself includes the transfer of \$1.4 billion dollars to Mexico over a period of three years. While this appears to increase military-to-military cooperation, most of these funds are to be used to purchase equipment and technology infrastructure for the exclusive use of Mexico's military and law enforcement agencies. Few resources are to be used for institution building, law enforcement initiatives, courts, and prisons.<sup>102</sup> The Merida initiative does not include joint exercises or military ventures of the type the U.S. conducts with other military allies, such as Canada, the U.K. and other NATO partners. In fact, when U.S. defense Secretary Robert Gates visited Mexico in 2008, he referred to U.S.-Mexico military to military relations as "not in its infancy, but is young... He acknowledged the sensitivities here in Mexico as his explanation for why the relationship is limited."<sup>103</sup>

In sum, Mexico's current military strategy remains similar to that pursued by Presidents Salinas, Zedillo and Fox. The relationship has become more intense and intimate, but this does not translate into a strategic alliance. Both countries are friends and economic allies, but distant neighbors when it comes to military affairs. Military cooperation is still limited and constrained, even in the face of increasing mutual threats, such as terrorism and turf wars among drug cartels.

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<sup>101</sup> Merida Initiative Official Web site, Secretaría de Gobernación, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, <http://www.iniciativamerida.gob.mx/?page=que-es-iniciativa-merida> (accessed February 2010).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 169.

### **III. CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS AND ITS EFFECTS ON UNITED STATES (U.S.)-MEXICO MILITARY RELATIONS**

The present study began by identifying a counterintuitive puzzle; that is, the United States and Mexico are strategic economic partners, but reluctant military allies. Why are these two interdependent countries so resistant to military cooperation? The previous chapter analyzed the bilateral relationship from an historical perspective using two of the most predominant international relations approaches, neo-realism and interdependence. Despite their explanatory power and value, both theories fail to explain the empirical puzzle identified in this study accurately. This, in turn, suggests that the absence of military-to-military cooperation in U.S.-Mexico relations lies not in international variables, but in domestic politics. Consequently, this chapter analyzes a key variable in Mexico's domestic politics that affects incentives for military cooperation. In particular, it argues that civil-military relations in Mexico impede higher levels of military-to-military cooperation with the United States. Indeed, military segregation and autonomy dissuade the Mexican armed forces from engaging their northern neighbor in ways that resemble U.S.-Mexico trade and economic cooperation.

To develop this argument, this chapter is divided into three sections. Section one deals with the issue of military segregation, including its historical sources and the perverse consequences. The second part of this chapter discusses how autonomy plays a role in shaping Mexico's defense preferences. Finally, the third section analyzes the armed forces' mission and orientation.

#### **A. SEGREGATED DEFENSE POLICY**

One of the key characteristics of Mexico's civil-military relations is that its military establishment is, effectively, segregated and isolated from politics, including foreign policy. In other words, unlike countries, such as the United States, where defense and foreign policy often overlap, in Mexico, a strict separation exists of both policies. As



argued in this section, segregation had positive consequences on the stability of civil-military relations in Mexico, but it also imposed a set of limits to cooperating militarily with the United States.

In a recent article published by Arturo Sotomayor, he argues that segregated national security doctrines tend to develop isolationist policies in world affairs, especially in the military domain. Following David Mares, Sotomayor argues that segregation is a civil-military pattern distinguished by its separation of tasks, whereby the military monopolizes every issue related to national security, while politicians are charged with developing the national wealth and conducting diplomacy. This civil-military pattern tends to isolate the military from politics, including international and foreign affairs.<sup>104</sup>

Indeed, the Mexican armed forces have been historically segregated from foreign policy. The root of this segregation stems from a “pact” signed between the civilian leadership and the generals in the late 1920s. The Mexican armed forces are the direct inheritors of the Revolutionary Army that defeated the Porfirio Díaz dictatorial regime in 1910. A number of caudillos, which in turn, occupied key positions within the Revolutionary Army, thus led the new regime that emerged from the dust of the revolutionary war. Hence, the key, if not the only predominant actors during the early years of Mexico’s Revolutionary era, were the Army generals (now former caudillos). To some extent, the Dictatorship of Díaz was substituted by a Revolutionary movement led essentially by military insurgents. The military dominated Mexico’s early political life, with many important revolutionary generals holding influential political posts between 1928–1934.

The foundation of the National Revolutionary Party (later the Revolutionary Institutional Party-PRI) in 1938 by then President and General Plutarco Elías Calles brought important changes to Mexican military politics. The party itself was created to halt violence and turf wars between the various victorious factions of the Mexican Revolution. In an effort to instill loyalty for the new party, Calles implemented a number

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<sup>104</sup> Arturo C. Sotomayor Velazquez, “Why Some States Participate in UN Peace Missions While Others Do Not: An Analysis of Civil-Military Relations and Its Effects on Latin America’s Contributions to Peacekeeping Operations,” *Security Studies* 19, no. 1 (January 2010): 16, 160–195.

of policies, including the professionalization of the Revolutionary Army by promoting young officers. However, it was not until the arrival to the presidency of General Lazaro Cardenas that the military began to be segregated from domestic politics.

Cardenas was interested in institutionalizing revolutionary politics in Mexico by strengthening the National Revolutionary Party. To that end, he not only changed the name of the party itself, but also incorporated more social sectors into its rank and file. Labor unions, peasants, and entrepreneurs were introduced into the party system once dominated by revolutionary generals. This, in turn, shifted power by allowing civilians to be included into the party's decision-making process.

Similarly, Cardenas promoted a pact that eventually separated the party from the military establishment. The pact was a simple tacit agreement between soldiers and civilians whereby the former accepted the demilitarization of politics and the latter conceded institutional autonomy. The pact was based on two unwritten rules: the *priista* government would respect military autonomy, and in return, the military would support the civilian regime.<sup>105</sup> The pact was also based on the principle of non-political intervention, which meant unconditional military support for the PRI and its leader, the president in office.

This pact facilitated the division of labor and made possible the emergence of a consensus, placing special emphasis on civilian supremacy, since there was nothing above the party. By 1946, when the first civilian president was elected (President Miguel Aleman Valdez), the military institution had not only been unified and disciplined, but had also been successfully subordinated to the civilian power. To ensure that the armed forces would remain loyal to the hegemonic party, PRI rulers limited budgets, reorganized military zones, and imposed education programs explicitly focusing on developing loyalty and discipline towards the party and civilian leadership. In other words, military-party links regulated, managed and co-opted the military's political behavior. In exchange, the armed forces were given institutional autonomy to decide

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<sup>105</sup> Guillermo Garduño Valero, *El ejercito mexicano entre la guerra y la política* (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2008), 218.

promotions, doctrine, strategy, and, of course, military operations.<sup>106</sup> In accordance with Samuel Huntington's reasoning, civilian control was established in Mexico through both objective and subjective means; that is, via professionalization, socializing soldiers to adopt an officer corps ethos, and via force division, by making the force subordinate to the political imperatives of the party in rule.<sup>107</sup>

The pact not only allowed a peaceful transition of power from the military to a civilian authority, it also enabled Mexico to maintain political stability precisely when the international system imposed serious pressures. Miguel Aleman was not only the first civilian president in Mexico; he also took power in the midst of World War II, just when U.S.-Mexico relations were improving after years of bilateral conflict.

Nevertheless, the unintended consequence of such pact was the *de facto* segregation of the military from politics, in general, and from foreign policy, in particular. Members of the military were not allowed to participate in politics, unless they had effectively retired from the force. A similar trend occurred in foreign policy. Unlike the United States, Mexico did not have a National Security Council to deal with security issues, precisely because it wanted to keep the armed forces isolated from the decision-making process. Indeed, with the exception of World War II, the Mexican armed forces were segregated, restrained and constrained to internal security and defense. Furthermore, civilians were hesitant to concede authority to generals during World War II. As argued in the previous chapter, "the Mexican members of the Mexico-U.S. Defense Commission were never given autonomy in the negotiations with their U.S. counterparts."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> See Roderic Camp, *Generals in the Palacio: The Military in Modern Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Mónica Serrano, "The Armed Forces Branch of the State: Civil-Military Relations in Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27 (1995): 423–448; Arturo C. Sotomayor Velazquez, "Different Paths and Divergent Policies in the UN Security System: Brazil and Mexico in Comparative Perspective," *International Peacekeeping* 16, no. 3 (June 2009): 373.

<sup>107</sup> The author thanks Arturo Sotomayor for this insight. Subjective control reins in military ambitions in the domestic sphere by actively subordinating the armed forces to the control of the government and other civilian groups. According to Huntington, this is in sharp contrast to the more effective method of objective control, which attempts to keep the military out of politics through increased modernization and professionalization. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and The State, The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Harvard University Press, 1957), 80–85.

<sup>108</sup> Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies, Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II*, 7.

The Cancillería, or Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was then delegated with the task of conducting Mexico's foreign relations. To this end, Mexico developed a mostly defensive and very legalistic foreign policy mostly concerned with economic development, political stability, and non-intervention in domestic affairs. This, in turn, explains why the "Mexican government did not have an interest or capacity to participate actively in international politics during the early Cold War years."<sup>109</sup> It also explains why Mexico was not eager to continue cooperating with the United States in military affairs, since such a move would have violated the principle of the pact itself, which was based on military segregation.

The evidence seems to suggest that Mexico prioritized political stability of the regime over other issues, including strong military ties with the United States. Every policy, including foreign policy, was designed to keep the PRI regime in power and enable the party itself to rule with peace. Consequently, the absence of military-to-military cooperation in the post-Cold War era was not due to lack of interest, balance of threats or interdependence. Instead, strong political forces within Mexico impeded a sustained and more profound cooperation with Washington in military affairs.

How then it is possible to explain the lack of military-to-military cooperation in the 1990s and 2000, when Mexico finally transited towards democracy? The democratization of Mexican politics in 2000 did not modify the civil-military pact itself; it simply altered party politics, but not civil-military relations. The Air Force, and especially the Army, continued to be focused on their domestic missions, consisting essentially of maintaining control of the intelligence community, providing public services in rural communities, containing revolutionary movements (such as the Zapatista movement in Chiapas and elsewhere), and halting trans-national organized crime (mostly drug-trafficking).<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ana Covarrubias, "Mexico: The Challenges of a Latin American Power in the U.S. Backyard," in *Latin American and Caribbean Foreign Policy*, ed. Frank O. Mora and Jeanne A. K. Hey (Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 23.

<sup>110</sup> Raúl Benítez and Stephen J. Wager, *National Security and Armed Forces in Mexico: Challenges and Scenarios at the End of the Century* (Washington, D.C.: Latin American Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1995).

Furthermore, the military institution did not represent the main obstacle for political liberalization. Consequently, there have been fewer incentives for military reform and modernization, since the armed forces are not perceived as an obstruction for competitive party politics. Thus, the nature of the civil-military pact remains intact, even if the dominant party has collapsed.

In addition, the Mexican armed forces have operated isolated from other federal agencies for many years. Wide-spread mistrust seem to exist between the Army and the Navy with respect to the federal, state and local law enforcement entities in Mexico, based in part on a lack of knowledge and interaction, but more so in the perception that the police forces in Mexico are notoriously corrupt. It was precisely the perception of law enforcement ineffectiveness and corruption that made President Felipe Calderon turn to the armed forces to fight the Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) since he took office in 2006. This fear of other federal agencies tends to reinforce military segregation.<sup>111</sup>

In sum, the military continues to be segregated from the decision-making process, assuming perhaps increasing roles and responsibilities due to drug trafficking and organized crime. Military-to-military cooperation remains limited in U.S.-Mexico relations, since the Mexican armed forces are still isolated from foreign policy and international affairs dynamics. In other words, the military establishment continues to have an inward-looking approach to anything related to defense matters, even if Mexico has now become more important to the United States than ever.

## **B. AUTONOMY AND DOCTRINE**

In addition to military segregation, the Mexican armed forces enjoy institutional autonomy on issues regarding operations, procedures, education, procurement, and organization. Hence, not only is the military segregated from foreign policy, but it also is actually independent from civilian imperatives, which also affects incentives for

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<sup>111</sup> See Craig A. Deare, "U.S.-Mexico Defense Relations: An Incompatible Interface," *Strategic Forum* 243, no. 15 (July 2009): 6.

cooperation with the United States. To understand how the armed forces operate, it is essential to explain the sources autonomy, which includes defense organization, budgets and procurement.

First, the Mexican military enjoys military autonomy in defense organization. As David Pion-Berlin argues,

military political autonomy... refers to the military's aversion towards or even defiance of civilian control. While it is part of the state, the military often acts as if it were above and beyond the constitutional authority of the government. The degree of political autonomy is a measure of the military's determination to strip civilians of their political prerogatives and claim these for itself. As the armed forces accumulate powers, they become increasingly protective of their gains. The more valuable and entrenched their interests are, the more vigorously they will resist the transfer of control over these to democratic leader.<sup>112</sup>

The term political autonomy matches Mexico's reality, since the defense establishment is supervised by the military itself, as the Ministry of Defense is a ranking member of the Army. Furthermore, different ministerial offices lead the Army and the Navy, have separate budgets and tend to report exclusively to the President.

Likewise, military promotions, retirements, and appointments are the exclusive domain of the armed forces themselves, with little or no civilian intervention.<sup>113</sup> In other words, military policy and personnel decisions depend exclusively on the discretion of the armed forces.

Similarly, Congress does not exercise legislative oversight over the armed forces. As Jordi Diez argues, "although the questioning of ministers by the defense and navy committees makes them accountable to the legislature, it has not been consequential; both ministers have systematically denied any wrongdoing and no investigation have been launched into the allegations by the ministries of Defense and the Navy."<sup>114</sup> In fact,

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<sup>112</sup> David Pion-Berlin, "Military Autonomy and Emerging Democracies in South America," *Comparative Politics* 25 (October 1992): 84.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>114</sup> Jordi Diez, "Legislative Oversight of the Armed Forces in Mexico," *Mexican Studies* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 128.

Congress has no competence when it comes to allegations of human rights committed by the military, since the Military Code of Justice provides implicit protection to soldiers and shields them from civilian intervention. A serious impediment to congressional oversight is the fact that most members of Congress who chair the defense and navy committees tend to be retired military officers themselves; thus, promotions, retirements and appointments tend to pass without any legislative questioning.

In recent years, multiple efforts have been attempted to make the military processes more transparent. In 2002 and 2003, reforms were introduced to modify the old promotion laws; yet, these changes have done very little to lower military autonomy. The lack of civilian expertise in military affairs is a serious obstacle to the promotion process, which in turn, enables the armed forces to behave as if there was no civilian oversight.

Second, the Mexican military enjoys political autonomy in budgetary affairs. While Congress is supposed to exercise budgetary oversight, in practice, legislators often approve military budgets as presented by the President. Historically, Congress has never altered or modified the amounts allocated to the Army and Navy, even though it has modified other items in the national budget. This practice heralds back to the PRI era, when the executive branch was responsible for delivering the budget, while Congress passively accepted his proposal.<sup>115</sup>

A deep-rooted culture of secrecy prevails in Mexico in terms of defense spending. To date, it might be possible to know how much is allocated to national defense, but quite little is known about how it is actually spent. As Jordi Diez argues, “autonomy over spending was one of the most important aspects that characterized the civil-military pact during the PRI rule, and the armed forces used it assertively.”<sup>116</sup> Once Congress approved budgets, the military had complete discretion to spend it. “The level of discretion has continued, and Congress has neither influenced decisions on spending nor overseen the actual spending.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Diez, “Legislative Oversight of the Armed Forces in Mexico,” 128.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

Third, procurement is another issue area in which the military enjoys significant autonomy. During the PRI era, the acquisition of military equipment was a very secretive and silent process. Access to equipment acquisition information was kept protected from outsiders. The only civilian informed of such purchases was the President himself, in his position as commander in chief. Congress and the general public had virtually no access to information regarding military acquisitions. A 2002 federal law on transparency and access to information, and a 2007 constitutional reform, increased avenues for public scrutiny of the Mexican government.<sup>118</sup> However, progress made in promoting transparency within the military has not yet been entirely matched by the services. The Army has often argued that acquisitions information is a national security issue, and thus, protected from disclosure.<sup>119</sup>

As mentioned before, Congress has rarely questioned the Navy and Army secretaries about reported cases of irregularities. For instance, in 2002, the Defense Secretary awarded six contracts to the firm Constructora y Edificadora Comalcalco, which was owned by the son of a retired division general. While this was in clear violation of legal stipulations, no investigations or inquiry was ever launched.<sup>120</sup>

The absence of civilian control in Mexico is an impediment to military-to-military cooperation with the United States. As Craig Deare argues:

The absence of an effective and trained civilian cadre in the defense realm not only has internal consequences for Mexico, but also contributes to interoperability issues with its counterparts to the north. The military-to-military relationships, primarily service-to-service, are adequate as far as they go. But in the U.S. Department of Defense, the Secretary, Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and other officials are all civilians

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<sup>118</sup> This law requires all federal public institutions to disclosed information upon written submission request by the general public. See Miguel Ángel Valverde Loya, “Transparencia, acceso a la información y rendición de cuentas: experiencias en la Unión Europea y México,” Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey Campus Ciudad de México, IX Congreso Internacional del CLAD sobre la Reforma del Estado y de la Administración Pública,” Madrid, España, November 2–5, 2004, 8–10. <http://derechoasaber.org/documentos/pdf0123.pdf> (accessed March 2010).

<sup>119</sup> For a critique of military justice in Mexico, see Human Rights Watch Report, [www.hrw.org/en/node/79216](http://www.hrw.org/en/node/79216) (accessed March 2010).

<sup>120</sup> Diez, “Legislative Oversight of the Armed Forces in Mexico,” 131.



appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. They have no civilian counterparts in Mexico; the same is true for the cadre of civil servants who work in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.<sup>121</sup>

Ultimately, political autonomy impedes civilian control and incites military segregation, impeding convergence between civilian imperatives and military interests. In Mexico, the military acts as if it were above and beyond the authority of civilian governments. As the armed forces have accumulated prerogatives and powers, they have become increasingly protective, skeptical of civilian and foreign intervention, unwilling to cooperate with external actors for fear of losing their protected gains. As a result, the armed forces have vested interests in keeping outsiders out of the military domain, be it civilians or foreigners.

### **C. MISSION AND ORIENTATION**

Mission and orientation is another factor that shapes incentives for military cooperation. Formal military cooperation and strategic alliances are more likely to emerge among countries that share similar doctrines, since this factor often facilitates inter-operability and jointness. While the United States and Mexico share similar economic structures, their military doctrines are inherently dissimilar.

U.S. doctrine is shaped fundamentally by external threats and has organized and equipped its military to deal essentially with external enemies. By contrast, the Mexican armed forces have been an inward-looking institution, driven essentially by internal threats and roles.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, with the exception of World War II, the Mexican armed forces have had an internally oriented role to perform. Mexico does not view any country as a potential threat or rival. “In fact, the Mexican armed forces do not have the structure, organization, or the capacity, to fulfill a traditional external defense mission (i.e., national

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<sup>121</sup> Deare, “U.S.-Mexico Defense Relations: An Incompatible Interface,” 5.

<sup>122</sup> For a discussion on the role of external and internal threats on military organizations and civilian control, see Michael C. Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); see also Deare, “U.S.-Mexico Defense Relations: An Incompatible Interface,” 16.

defense, preservation the sovereignty and territorial integrity).”<sup>123</sup> “That threat, in fact, is not even a scenario considered in the national strategy, in light of the relative position and asymmetries of Mexico with its neighbors: the enormous power of United States and the small Central American countries.”<sup>124</sup> As Sotomayor argues, “Mexico is too small to fight a war against the United States and too big to battle the small and weak states to its south.”<sup>125</sup>

In the absence of significant external threats, the armed forces’ focus is on its internal threats. Traditionally, Latin America’s armed forces have had a variety of internal security functions: counterinsurgency, drug interdiction, fighting organized crime, and quelling social protest. Guerrilla insurgency remains a problem in areas, such as Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Chiapas. For instance, subversion and counterinsurgency was particularly intense during the 1994 Zapatista revolt in Chiapas. Drug interdiction has become the most visible role performed by the military in Mexico; one which the United States has urged Mexico (along with other Latin American states) to assume. However, as Wendy Hunter reiterates, fighting the drug war is imperative, but assigning such a mission to the armed forces promises to be counterproductive from the standpoint of scaling back the military’s influence in Latin American society. A military charged with drug interdiction could very well demand the right to conduct surveillance, to apprehend suspects, and even to administer justice.”<sup>126</sup>

Civic action and development roles, such as the provision of food and health services in poor and remote areas, infrastructure building, and environmental protection, is another internal role performed by the Mexican military. Civic action stems from Mexico’s need to reach rural areas, especially during natural disasters.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> “Las fuerzas armadas de México: entre la tipicidad y el mito.” This article is a true and accurate copy of that published in the magazine *Nueva Sociedad* 213 (January–February 2008).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Arturo C. Sotomayor Velazquez, “Mexico’s Armed Forces,” *Hemisphere* 16 (Spring 2006): 33.

<sup>126</sup> See Wendy Hunter, *State and Soldier in Latin America, State and Soldier in Latin America: Peaceworks #10* (Washington, D.C., United States Institute of Peace, 1999), 5.

<sup>127</sup> Secretaria de la Defensa Nacional, <http://www.sedena.gob.mx/> (accessed March 2010).

Ultimately, these differences in mission and orientation also affect the chances of inter-operability and jointness with the United States. As Deare argues:

the American and Mexican militaries have evolved in distinct fashions over the past 100 years, and today have very different responsibilities, mission sets, orientations, and capabilities. In addition, a number of structural realities present on each side of the border, including a bilateral lack of trust, pose challenges for improved interaction and greater collaboration between the armed forces of each country. The combination of circumstances has created an “incompatible interface” in terms of U.S.-Mexican military interaction.<sup>128</sup>

In sum, the liberalization of politics in Mexico has made the armed forces even more inward looking and nationalist. The absence of democratic civilian control and accountability means that civilian leaders are not responsible for designing and shaping military policy in Mexico, and thus, provide little or no input on issues regarding military cooperation with the United States. As Sotomayor argues, “while Mexico is the U.S. third largest trading partner, its inability to provide military support to Washington makes it a less than reliable neighbor and ally, particularly at a time when the U.S. administration has prioritized strategic and military security concerns.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Deare, “U.S.-Mexico Defense Relations: An Incompatible Interface,” 1.

<sup>129</sup> Sotomayor Velazquez, “Mexico’s Armed Forces,” 33.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

Since the 1990s, a quantitative and qualitative shift in economic relations has occurred between Canada, Mexico and the United States through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). NAFTA has indeed deepened economic and social integration between neighbors. Nevertheless, despite this economic partnership, Mexico and the United States are far from being military allies. Since NAFTA was signed in 1994, the United States and Mexico have rarely developed institutional links in the military domain, with few bilateral military agreements and no formal alliances between them. Why have these two countries been so distant in their military relations, while being so closed in economic and social terms? Why have these two economic partners been unable to become military allies? Why is military cooperation with Mexico so difficult to achieve?

To answer to these questions, this thesis analyzes U.S.-Mexico relations from an historical perspective and assesses how bilateral military cooperation has evolved since World War II. The thesis finds that World War II brought increased U.S.-Mexican military cooperation, as Mexico supported the U.S. war effort by deploying soldiers to the Asian theatre and allowing U.S. troops to use Mexican territory and bases for American forces. Cooperation was even institutionalized with the establishment of the Joint Mexican-U.S. Defense Commission. Nevertheless, following the war, bilateral military cooperation returned to its traditional and distant phase. The United States focused its military efforts on Europe and Asia, while Mexico turned to domestic matters. In other words, after years of military cooperation, the United States and Mexico became distant neighbors. It was not until the mid-1990s that U.S. and Mexican political leaders revised the status of the bilateral relationship, leading to the entry into force of NAFTA in 1994. However, even with such a strategic economic relationship, military cooperation remained limited, with few bilateral military interactions.

To explain why the U.S. and Mexico remained so distant in military matters, this thesis assessed two competing explanations available in the international relations literature, including neorealism and economic interdependence. Concerning the former, the thesis finds that common threats can only explain military cooperation during World War II, when both countries formed a common alliance to fight against a common enemy. However, the existence of external threats cannot account for why Mexico and the United States opted for such a distant relationship following the war. Clearly, both states faced common threats, including being targeted by Soviet nuclear missiles; but this was insufficient to maintain Mexico as an ally. Likewise, economic interdependence cannot explain why military-to-military cooperation remained so limited in the face of growing economic integration. Thus, the evidence suggests that military cooperation does not follow economic trends or international patterns. Ultimately, international relations theories are insufficient to explain in full the empirical puzzle identified in this thesis.

The thesis then focuses on domestic politics to explain the lack of military cooperation in U.S.-Mexico relations. It does so by paying special attention to how civil-military relations in Mexico shape policy preferences and incentives for cooperation. In particular, the Mexican military's political autonomy and its segregated status from the foreign policy establishment is the strongest limitation to increased military interaction with the United States. Segregation entails the explicit and sometimes tacit separation of tasks, roles, and assignments regarding defense and foreign policy issues. For all practical purposes, the military rarely, if ever, participates in the foreign policy decision-making process. Hence, segregation incites an inward-looking approach to security matters within the military establishment.

On the other hand, the armed forces' political autonomy also impedes higher levels of military cooperation with the United States. The Mexican military enjoys doctrinal, budgetary, acquisitions, and mission autonomy, allowing it to formulate its own policies and determine its own destiny with virtually no civilian oversight. The absence of civilian control impedes convergence with civilian authorities and limits interoperability with U.S. forces. As Craig Deare argues, the United States has "no civilian counterparts in Mexico" and thus, cannot fully cooperate with Mexico at the

strategic level.<sup>130</sup> Consequently, civil-military relations in Mexico exercise an important negative effect on the bilateral relationship by affecting the incentives to cooperate on military affairs.

Thus, what can Mexico and the United States do to bring military cooperation to the level where it is needed? Since the absence of civilian control and accountability in Mexico is an obstacle to increased cooperation, it seems natural that one way in which the United States may be able to affect preferences is by supporting efforts to increase military transparency in Mexico. This transparency may be achieved by educating civilians on defense matters to develop civilian expertise in military affairs. Likewise, the United States can support Mexico's war on drugs, via the Merida initiative, conditioned on the Mexican government meeting basic requirements on democratic civilian control. This policy of providing carrots in exchange for domestic reform has been used in the past, when the United States supported NATO's enlargement in Eastern Europe, provided the new members fulfilled basic transparency requirements. Similarly, Washington can assist in engaging civil society by supporting local non-governmental organizations and journalists interested in monitoring the armed forces. Finally, programs, such as the International Military Education and Training program, may help the process by educating and socializing young Mexican officers into new roles and democratic norms compatible with civilian control.

Nevertheless, even with these initiatives, achieving full military-to-military cooperation in U.S.-Mexico relations is likely to take some time, since the main source of change lies in Mexico's own domestic politics. Civilian control cannot be imposed, and hence, the main impetus for military reform must come from within Mexico.

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<sup>130</sup> Deare, "U.S.-Mexico Defense Relations: An Incompatible Interface," 5.

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